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SUBJECT: ELECTION REGISTRATION FALTERING IN PLATEAU STATE

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) PolOff and PolFSN went to Jos in Plateau State October 29-31. During the trip, we visited the local headquarters of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and of the Independent National Electoral Institute (INEC). Both of these visits suggested that election preparations are going poorly and that elections stand a substantial chance of being delayed.

¶2. (C) PolOff and PolFSN visited PDP State Secretary Alhaji Sale Bayari on October 30. The visit was to discuss the ongoing effort to impeach Governor Joshua Dariye (Septel). The PDP official actively took the party line on a number of subjects, including the impeachment of Governor Dariye. However, we also asked him if he had yet registered to vote. He said he had no idea how to do so, and indicated that he did not know anyone else who had yet registered. This seemed odd as INEC had already kicked off their voter registration effort in the state. Without prompting, he opined that flawed elections are better than no elections at all. When we then asked him if he thought there would be timely elections, he said that was not possible.

¶3. (C) Key to Sale Bayari's concerns about timely elections was voter registration. He said that there are 11 of the "direct capture" registration machines in the state and that some of those are not working. He indicated that staff were poorly trained and that registration would run well beyond the December deadline. In his view, elections in April are "not possible." He predicted elections sometime "in the June to September time period" with a transition of power in October. He said that for even those delayed elections to be possible, the direct capture method of voter registration would have to be abandoned and INEC will have to revert to some sort of revision of the flawed 2003 voter rolls.

¶4. (C) After the meeting at PDP headquarters, PolOff and PolFSN went to Plateau State INEC headquarters to visit Resident Electoral Commissioner Martins Okunfolami. He took a much more positive view of the situation and insisted that registration will be completed on time. However, the specific numbers are discouraging. He said that INEC had 20 registration machines in the state, and that he was confident they could complete the registration in a timely manner if they received the rest of the machines. When asked how many total machines they need, he said 658. He was hopeful they would be received by the end of the week, but did not know. There was also no plan to distribute those machines to registration centers or train people how to use them. He acknowledged that the batteries on many of the machines are not fully functional. He also said that his colleagues in other states had received even less equipment than he had.

15. (C) COMMENT. The situation in the field seems to support what we hear in Abuja. INEC does not have the equipment it needs to complete voter registration and there is no firm plan for when they will get it or how they will use it. Of more concern, however, is the statement by the local PDP secretary. We believe it is significant that a high ranking

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member of the ruling party would be so open in discussing delays in the election and a change to the registration procedure. When asked who he thought was responsible for the delays, he relied, "The government of course." The situation on the ground in Plateau State is another troubling indication that the government is either unwilling or unable to conduct timely elections in 2007. END COMMENT.

CAMPBELL